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Stewart honored for fusion work

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Stewart honored for fusion work

Monterey CA - September 2014



Experience as a sworn police officer. Firefighter. Paramedic. Public Health professional.

Looking at her resume, Center for Homeland Defense and Security master's degree alumna Gail Stewart could be a one-person fusion center. As a public health professional, she draws on the whole of her background as the Emergency Services Sector Fusion Liaison Officer Program Administrator at the North Florida Fusion eXchange (NFFX).

Stewart was honored this past summer with the NFFX Spirit Award, based on her accomplishments and work in driving the fusion center's momentum.

"She was instrumental in allowing us to have immediate access to all those other disciplines," said NFFX Intelligence Analyst Michele Perry. "She can speak to all sorts of topics. The reasoning for giving this award is that we feel our fusion center's progress was greatly enhanced by Gail's wealth of knowledge and varied skill sets."

The NFFX was established almost four years ago and serves a 13-county swath of North Florida stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to the Georgia border. Stewart plays a multi-faceted role, in addition to her regular day-to-day job as Health and Medical Preparedness Coordinator with the Florida Department of Health.

Her input played a crucial role in the development of the NFFX, said DHS Under Secretary Scott McAllister, an Executive Leaders Program alumnus who was Florida's Deputy Homeland Security Advisor (HSA) at the time.

"I had the pleasure of working with Gail, a fellow NPS alum, in my prior career with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement," said Scott McAllister, Deputy Under Secretary of DHS. "Gail was a key player in bringing the issues of the Department of Health into the daily operations of the North Florida Fusion Exchange (NFFX), a node of the state's primary fusion center. "Gail was a proud graduate of NPS and brought her education to bear in improving process at the fusion center."

Along with Perry, Stewart recruits fusion liaison officers and leads orientation programs. In addition, she contributes to domain awareness, interprets health terminology and works with law enforcement on matters such as prescription drug fraud and unlicensed activity. More directly, she writes analytical products on topics such as health implications of human trafficking and the health impacts of mass gatherings.

During its short history the NFFX has garnered success:

- A fugitive was apprehended by the Fort Lauderdale Fugitive Task Force based upon information shared between Valdosta, Georgia, and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, police departments. NFFX received a bulletin and an analyst proactively contacted Valdosta Police to determine a Florida nexus. NFFX provided appropriate notifications which ended in the apprehension of the fugitive.
- NFFX sponsored training for Transient Criminal Groups. Attendees networked on breaks with each another and faculty. As a result of the networking at the training and subsequent discussions, a fraud case was identified and remains under investigation.
- NFFX received a "be on the lookout" bulletin from Indiana regarding a parole violation suspect acting in a threatening way to elicit a response from police, sometimes known as "suicide by cop," who was headed south. After approximately 14 hours of research and information sharing between state and local agencies, Florida officials apprehended the suspect without incident.

The NFFX is considered a "node" fusion center that feeds analysis to the larger Florida Fusion Center in addition to the counties in its coverage area. Unlike larger fusion centers, the NFFX was first staffed with law enforcement analysts and included liaison officers from public health, emergency medical services, fire and emergency management rather than traditional law enforcement personnel that form the basis of many other centers.

That decision to begin with public health intelligence staff and make Stewart among the first was made in large part because of her vast network and expertise, Perry said. A leader in law enforcement and CHDS alum recognized the value of Gail's collaboration and identified her as a vital partner in the region and recommended her



Gail Stewart



for the Master's program. Stewart's CHDS master's degree thesis, "Alternate Care Sites for the Management of Medical Surge during Disasters," calls for the development of disaster healthcare coalitions to partner to manage the healthcare system during patient surge in a disaster.

"My thesis emphasizes community collaboration and resource utilization from all levels (local, state and federal) during a medical surge," Stewart said. "No one entity can manage disaster medical surge without the engagement of partnerships."

Stewart takes the same collaborative approach to fusion center operations, reaching out to an array of disciplines and contacts garnered over more than three decades of professional experience in the Sunshine State. The number of those connections swelled through her CHDS education, she added, and she and the alumni network and cohort members continue to interact professionally.

"I could never quantify how valuable the education at CHDS has been and will continue to be especially with the ability to call upon graduates across state lines and across disciplines," Stewart noted.

CHDS' reputation is beneficial not only with fellow alumni, Stewart said, but with homeland security professionals across the nation. Stewart has leveraged CHDS contacts in New York, enabling her to visit and bring back information to share with colleagues and implement in Florida.

"I've learned it's OK to say I don't know the answer and know the answer can be found by outreach to the CHDS network," Stewart noted. "We have a national synergy which allows for the opportunity to reach out, share ideas and collaborate with those that have had the CHDS experience. Extending long after graduation, and beyond the degree, the Center continues to offer research resources such as CHDS' Homeland Security Digital Library and a connection to scholars, the value is immeasurable. I will be forever grateful for the CHDS experience."